

REMARKS

The final Office action mailed on 18 August 2004 (Paper No. 20040816) and the Advisory Action mailed on 24 November 2004 (Paper No. 20041122) have been carefully considered. Allowance of claims 1 thru 3, 5 and 6, as set forth in paragraph 8 of the final Office action, is appreciated.

Claims 1, 7, 12, 13, 15 and 16 are being amended. Thus, claims 1 thru 3, 5 thru 13, 15 and 16 are pending in the application.

It should be noted that allowed claim 1 is being amended to correct an error and to render claim 1 consistent with Figure 9 of the application. That is, with reference to Figure 9, the last paragraph of amended claim 1 recites that the common port of said each switching device (MUX1, MUX2, ..., MUXn) is connected to the second port of said given function-extending module (FM1, FM2, ..., FMn), and that said n-1 selection ports of said each switching device (MUX1, MUX2, ..., MUXn) are connected to the first port of n-1 other **function-extending modules** (FM1, FM2, ..., FMn). Contrary to the statement attached to the Advisory Action of 24 November 2004 (Paper No. 20041122), the scope of the invention recited in claim 1 has not been substantially changed, and claim 1 should still be allowable over the prior art for the reasons stated in paragraph 9 of the final Office action of 18 August 2004 (Paper No. 20040816).

In paragraph 2 of the Office action, the Examiner objected to claim 12 because the claim does not end with a period. Claim 12 is being amended to correct that error.

In paragraph 4 of the Office action, the Examiner rejected claims 12, 13 and 15 under 35 U.S.C. §112 (second paragraph) for alleged indefiniteness. Claim 12 is being amended to recite “a module rack” on line 2. Thus, the rejection under 35 U.S.C. §112 (second paragraph) should no longer apply.

In paragraph 6 of the Office action, the Examiner rejected claims 7 thru 11 and 16 under 35 U.S.C. §103 for alleged unpatentability over Matsumoto *et al.*, U.S. Patent No. 5,621,659 in view of Drucker, U.S. Patent No. 5,591,984. In paragraph 7 of the Office action, the Examiner rejected claims 12, 13 and 15 under 35 U.S.C. §103 for alleged unpatentability over Matsumoto *et al.* ‘659 in view of Drucker ‘984, and further in view of Lach, U.S. Patent No. 6,363,452. For the reasons stated below, it is submitted that the invention recited in the claims, as now amended, is distinguishable from the prior art cited by the Examiner so as to preclude rejection under 35 U.S.C. §103.

Claims 7, 12 and 16 are being amended to recite in more detail the manner in which a newly installed function-extending module (FEM) is connected to a previously installed FEM, that is, by reciting the respective ports (first and second) of each FEM, as well as the common port of a first switching unit and the selection port of a second switching unit.

These recitations are consistent with and similar to the recitations set forth in allowed claim 1.

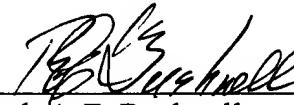
Furthermore, it is noted that the recitations in question apparently served as a basis for the Examiner's statement of reasons for allowing claims 1 thru 3, 5 and 6, as set forth in paragraph 9 of the Office action. Therefore, the insertion of these recitations into claims 7, 12 and 16 should result in allowance of these claims, especially since the cited prior art does not disclose or suggest the recited "common port" of a "first switching unit" or the recited "selection port" of a "second switching unit", and does not disclose or suggest their interconnection with each other and with the previously installed FEM and newly installed FEM.

In view of the above, it is submitted that the claims of this application are in condition for allowance, and early issuance thereof is solicited. Should any questions remain unresolved, the Examiner is requested to telephone Applicant's attorney.

Fees of \$790.00 and \$120.00 are incurred by filing of a Request for Continued Examination and a Petition for a one-month extension of time, respectively. Applicant's check in the total amount of 910.00 drawn to the order of Commissioner accompanies this Amendment. Should the check become lost, be deficient in payment, or should other fees

be incurred, the Commissioner is authorized to charge Deposit Account No. 02-4943 of Applicant's undersigned attorney in the amount of such fees.

Respectfully submitted,



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Date: 12/17/04
I.D.: REB/JGS